



State of Connecticut
GENERAL ASSEMBLY
Commission on Children



Children in the Wake of Terrorism

A Prevention Agenda on Civics, Safety and Leadership

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The parent could not get the child away from the tree. He was clinging, arms around the trunk. No, he would not go to school. Finally the parent called the principal. The principal suggested she ask her son why he was holding on to the tree. The child said, "I have not finished saying all the prayers I need to say for the people in the building." It's a good thing he had something to hold on to.

A four-year-old sat in her room rocking back and forth, back and forth, "Poor New York. Poor New York."

Laura was in Newark, New Jersey when a section of the airport caught fire. After much delay, her family boarded a plane to Atlanta. The plane did not take off -- some sort of mechanical failure. They were then flown with others to LaGuardia to catch a connecting flight to their destination. Just ready for take off, the pilot unexpectedly said, "Everyone off the plane." They got out, and looked up as the World Trade Center imploded.

The airport abruptly closed down. Laura drove with her mother and a stranger whom the mother took in even though they had different skin color, cultures and ways of being. They drove without looking back until they were on Long Island. Waited for a ferry to Bridgeport for five hours. Laura's ten-year-old words in the early morning light were,

"I will never trust the sky again."

Her apartment in New York is destroyed. Everyone evacuated. The place she birthed her first child, the early years, erased. When it was suggested that she write the dreams down, she looked

like the idea was crazy—as if the dreams aren't dreams but something else and if they were written down something poisonous might creep in to the already broken rafters.

The child cut down all the sunflowers, dahlias, and tomatoes. He took a sword and knocked down one tall vine and flower after another. When his mother, still shaken by September 11, uncontrollably screamed and gave a moral lecture on choices in life we have to make each day to keep beauty abounding, he said the whole neighborhood decided to do it. Joey, whose mother is a drug addict, led it. But, in truth, all the boys joined in. They had just selected the youngest to hack down the tallest plants in her garden.

Stan is 35. So haunted by September 11 he says, "Even an acorn on a tin roof scares me."

Similarly, Susan, age 5, was in her room when thunder started. She ran into her parent's room and wanted to know if it was a bomb.



One school played the news on the public announcement system throughout the day on the unfolding terrorism at the World Trade Center and Pentagon. Then a school lockdown occurred with all children in the gymnasium. A child went to a counselor that evening, terrified of war; another came to school the next day throwing up in the car as she got closer to the school building. She had begun to fear the school itself.

On September 12, a parent received a letter saying her child was disruptive, wouldn't stop talking all day. When the father asked what the problem was, his daughter said she was afraid that if she stopped talking she would see the images of the explosion again and again and not be able to stop them. She had begun to fear silence.

During open school night, a principal thanked the parents for talking to the children at home. He said the children would not be permitted to talk about terrorism in the classroom. This was the job of the parents. The teachers would get on with the school routine and curriculum.

Each class had a teacher presenting to parents. The teacher went through the assigned topics and detailed the curriculum. She talked about field trips, a section on minerals, texts and homework. Then she began to sob. The parents sat helplessly watching while the teacher shook, as in Isaiah, "Thou hast drunken the dregs of the cup of trembling."

In Greenwich, children made lunches for the firemen sifting through the wreckage. The children wrote notes in each lunch. Each note began with "Dear Hero." They had the assignment of writing letters to one of three groups—1) the heroes; 2) the families who were missing someone; or 3) the terrorists who hit the building.

Here are a few of the letters:

Dear Hero:

Thank you so much for saving many, many people's lives. There's someone in my class that thinks his uncle died because he was on the 94th floor or something like that. I really hope you find him!

Good luck - Good luck - Good luck!

Your friend

Dear Hero:

Thank you for saving my aunt and all the other people. You are very brave saving all those people. I hope the food in this bag brings you the strength to go on today. I hope you get home safe.

The answer for some children may be cutting down tomato plants to reenact the tumbling down of something tall and beautiful. To become the strong unexpected force in order to master the crash that so unexpectedly poured into our days, dreams, hearts just a few weeks ago.

But children are also struggling with principles and philosophy. This letter, for example, talks about law, democracy, time, and forgiveness. It speaks from a community voice:

Dear Terrorist:

I know now that your country is celebrating and ours is crying. We will show our strength to rebuild the things that we have lost. And not only did you hurt us when you did this, but you hurt the world. You showed the earth that you can't forgive someone and that you will forever hold a grudge. Well we won't. We will have to put people to trial and in jail but in the end, we will forgive you, and hopefully you will forgive us.



A Prevention Agenda on Civics, Safety and Leadership

So how do we proceed in the wake of this tragedy for children everywhere? What do we do differently in our own lives, with our families, in our schools and communities as well as in state policy? Despite new fiscal constraints and agenda reprioritization, what policies can we build that respond to children and their families' heightened fears and concerns?

See Hope, Not Pathology in this National Disaster

There has been a focus on pathology after September 11. Many of us are in grief, both for those who directly lost someone and for those who are grieving a loss of innocence and safety.

But there is another side to this unexpected tumult. We must not forget the contribution, the depth and rise in community caring, the defiance of terrorism through youth projects, benefit concerts and a persistent sacrifice of the helping professions. With the possibility of more terrorism and war, we need to sustain this celebration of freedom.

There is an intergenerational outpouring of respect and pride in our nation, from the highest buildings to the small streets in a suburban neighborhood. In the greater New York area, altars were lit with candlelight by abandoned cars never driven home from the commuter train stations after a day's work in Manhattan. It is the capability of this nation to proudly come forward in tribute to the tireless workers unearthing and repairing our losses that cannot be responded to only by a time with grief counselors. Mental health prevention and early intervention are paramount now to address the tremors of a nation in grief. But they must be partnered with the soul of this country and a civic pride that will get us through much of the battle.



Civics and Family Leadership

The terrorists tried to hijack democracy. We need to take it back. We cannot take it back through a rebuilding of towers. We can take it back only by practicing it.

But most people don't know how democracy fully works. And now, more than ever, people are eager to protect it. So what are we protecting? And how can we preserve this vital institution for our children?

The tools of change and civics are not in everyone's toolkit. Given what has just been challenged, what we take for granted needs to be better understood and practiced. The principles challenged by terrorism include freedom, legal justice, and individuality within a nation that is indivisible.

When families understand how to routinely use the tools of democracy, they will increasingly interact with local and state government. In the last few years, there has been a seeding of civic efforts in youth and family leadership as well as democracy curriculums across this nation. These might be sown now where citizens want to contribute deeply, but lack the tools to offer their fullest potential.



Teach Tolerance

Begin with we. As a nation attacked, there is a coming together across myriad differences. People are looking at each other, talking, across class lines, across age, across the color of our skin. Asking how people are doing, what they are thinking. There is a reaching forward and out that should not be tucked back and under when we remember our place and status and work woes.

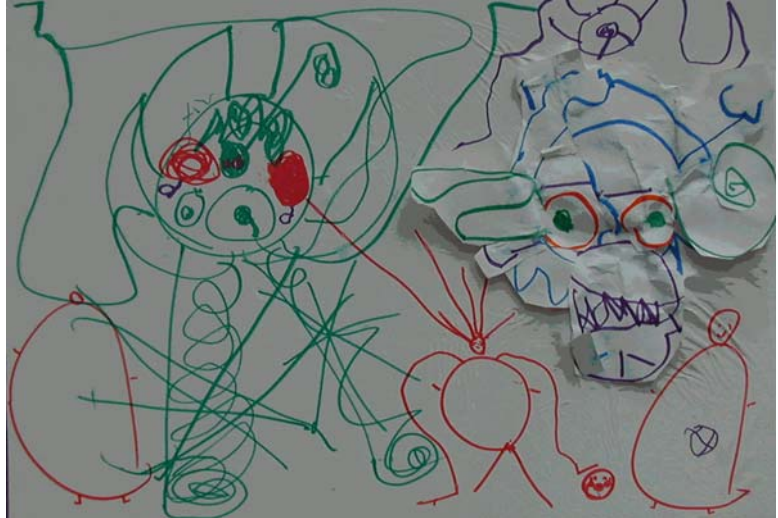
With both more tolerance and respect towards many in this crisis, we also witness increased bias and fear towards Arabs. Jews are also being blamed for the wrath against our nation. The increase in tolerance for some cannot hide the decrease in tolerance for others. Hate cannot be treated with hate.

Diversity is in fact a core principle and entry point of America's birth and anchor for liberty. Cross-cultural activity and policies that embrace and teach the democratic strength of living with diversity should be maximized. It is this that we are witnessing in community events and neighborhood giving that will help us pridefully rebuild our losses.

Terrorists choose to eradicate difference through targeted acts of violence, abuse and annihilation. If there is ever a time that difference should be embraced, it is now. The teachings for children on tolerance are in the air.

Honor One Another for Good Work and Deeds

Heroes need to be celebrated in daily life. This is about respect, caring, building and rebuilding our hope. There are heroes out there, unsung heroes. We do not honor them enough. Not just in the horror of searching for bodies and bone. There are heroes digging for truth all over this nation.



Children will need to see as much dignity in unsung heroes as they see the images of the World Trade Towers imploding. Walt Whitman wrote in "I Hear America Singing": "We are singing — all over — at parks, in ball games, in church to keep the pride of our people and the dignity of those who we lost alive."

Dear Hero:

I am very proud of you for what you have done. I would love to help you but since I am only nine, I am too young. You have done something very nice for America and to give my thanks, I hope you enjoy this lunch and letter.

Build Community Leaders

Neighborhood leadership of both youths and parents can offer hope in a time of confusion. We may not be able to prevent chemical warfare — but we must guide and lead where we can intervene.

With a sense that national problems following September 11 are vast, global and militarily overwhelming, families may subtly be rendered more and more powerless. Working where change is possible, with substantive outcomes, will be critical to hope and sustainable community engagement.

Leadership is a special glue. It brings together potential, vision and difference. Leaders know how to firmly link potential with reality, how to pace change and how to be patient through change and loss. Good leaders have the short and long view in mind.

This letter from a teenager offers ideas, empathy and the desire to learn from leadership, as well as to lead himself.

Dear President Bush:

I am very sorry about what happened at the World Trade Center and Pentagon yesterday. The floor that my father works on at the World Financial Center was blown out, but he was in Israel at the time. He is currently in Amsterdam and cannot get home.

I was looking forward to having him back only to find out that all airports were closed. When will it be safe to open them again? Surely whoever hijacked those planes wouldn't attempt anything again, with the military on high alert. I would like to know if and when the World Trade Center will be rebuilt.

I also have an idea about security. Post the National Guard and helicopters over each every important city in the country. Put three to five men from the Secret Service, FBI, or CIA on board each plane coming or leaving the United States. With Special Agents on every possible plane, it would take large numbers to hijack any other plane. Please open a few airports; many people are thousands of miles away from home.

P.S. You make a wonderful speech last night; I wish I could make speeches like you.

There are ideas and willing citizens primed now to be involved. State and local policymakers benefit from truly partnering with youth and parent leaders in this time of recommitment to family and community.

What are the values of community state partnerships?

Democracy is the bridge linking the school, community, parents and cultures. Civic participation can create vibrant partnerships. Families can generate consumer ideas, expand networks, bolster diversity and improve conditions for the next generation.

Community Matters. Community is the canvas to family life. When community is thriving, families, workers and youth have more resources, access points, and opportunities for interaction.

Relationships are basic to change. Growth hinges on connection to others. In times of crisis, relationships are the bridge to a resilient moving forward and back without difficulty.

Intergenerational environments offer natural mentorship. Intergenerational activity offers tutelage and creates a chronological chain between the past and the future. Activity across generations offers story, history and continuity of purpose for all ages.

Expectation brings response. High expectation leads to respect and increased interaction. Expecting parents and youth to participate and teaching them how to enter civic discourse, creates exponential gains for school, family and workplace.



The schoolhouse as town hub of democracy

In the face of terrorism, what is crucial for children after national security is the comfort and safety of family, school and community. Children need to sense that the world is safe and that they are surrounded by people who know and take care of one another with respect and hope.

The schoolhouse is the architecture of democracy on the town level. It is where we vote, where parents come together, where all children are guaranteed the right to free and equal educational opportunity. Children need to see neighborhood and schoolhouse as safe, strong and caring. This is where they live and learn to become participants in and shapers of our democracy.

School safety. The school building must be rendered safe for children to learn. Safety involves a structural as well as a communications response. School crisis prevention and response plans address: 1) physical safety and security; 2)

dissemination of accurate and appropriate information to children, staff, parents and community; and 3) the emotional and psychological needs of children, staff, parents and community. If any of these three components is missing, the overall plan does not work well.

In this unprecedented crisis where the goal of terrorism is to terrify, the emotional impact of the acts of aggression can equal physical violence.

Student assistance teams. Student Assistance Teams are a school-based prevention and intervention strategy to address individual and systemic crisis situations. Student Assistance Teams are often comprised of an administrator, psychologist, social worker, teachers and other key staff who accept referrals from members of the school community and parents. Referrals can be about students who are manifesting behaviors that are impeding learning as well as classrooms where behavior is an obstacle to educational goals or safety.

The Student Assistance System is also the school based crisis response team. A district-wide crisis team is also created to link community, students and families in times of regional emergency.

Boards of Education seek to protect the health, safety and learning of each school. A best practice for district wide support might include a school assistance system in each school with a district-wide crisis team in place in case of regional disaster.

School-community partners. School-community partnerships anchor safety for children as they go back and forth between home and formal learning. They can also assuage parents who may worry for their child's safety in this new uncharted context.

Over the past decade, parent involvement with schools has revealed exceptional gains in learning for children. These include higher achievement in reading, grades and test scores; better attendance; fewer placements in special education; higher graduation rates and greater enrollment in post-secondary education.

Parent partnerships with schools have also revealed gains for teachers as well as the school itself. Parent-school partnerships have been shown to routinely improve teacher morale, help develop better instructional strategies for use in classroom lessons and to bolster parent support in the classroom.

Students need to be enveloped now, both at home and at school, with a sense of normalcy and security. As parent school partnerships improve both schools and children's learning, they are likely to also bolster school safety and psychological security.

Safe after-school activity: keeping schools open. Families now want to know that their children are properly protected with trained adults while they work. Working parents are seeking more safety measures to ensure that children, who might ordinarily be modestly tended after school, are safe during the out-of-school time hours from 3:00 to 7:00 PM.

Nearly 40 percent of teens have no adult supervision after school. 75 percent of teens are more afraid of being a victim of violence or a crime after school than during school hours and over half in a recent teen survey said that there were not enough programs for them. After the terrorist attacks, children may benefit from more precise and supervised activity in the after school hours.

The Bush Administration has placed attention on after school activities. Policies such as the Twenty-First Century School grants are likely to expand. Similarly, national foundations are coming together to offer technical assistance and grants to improve coordination of after school activity which is currently slim and fragmented. States might benefit from coordinating after school activity across policy and budget domains, to increase supply, ensure quality and most importantly, train for safety.

Schools might stay open by partnering with community agencies for quality out-of-school time activity. Janitors lost so many peers in the World Trade Center; the commitment to safety and open buildings might just be supported and co-led by them today. Towns that have wanted safer after school programs have picked up nominal insurance costs for non-profits to allow the schools to be open with neighborhood programs as partners.

The link between schools and mental health. Posttraumatic stress can come open like a hinge, unexpected and strong. Five years after the Oklahoma bombing, psychologists are still receiving calls from people who are just now admitting their symptoms and difficulties with functioning.

Some children are facing fear and turmoil just as adults are. They need support and to be able to discuss unfolding concerns with reliable, well-trained adults. For example, Josh, age fourteen, flies to Virginia every three weeks to visit his father. Now, his parents are afraid to let him travel and he hasn't seen his dad for almost two months. Unable to talk about his sadness and fears, he's becoming increasingly angry with his mom "for keeping him away from his father."

Teachers also need support to get on with the high expectation of teaching and student excellence within this new context of uncertainty. Many seek opportunity to talk about what they

are observing in the students, to discuss what they themselves are feeling, as well as to be trained to refer children who might be at risk from this national crisis. In a recent teacher poll taken by the teachers union, virtually one half of teachers felt they had all the support and tools they needed to help children through the aftermath of September 11. The other half were needing more from their administration.

The linkage between the schoolhouse and mental health support is formally lacking. There is not often a coordinated system of care for the student and the mental health needs of students, both in crisis and in need of preventative interventions. This link is paramount now to ensure an emotionally secure environment and learning routine for children.

Complete the children's mental health system

Build community systems of care. Millions will become stronger from the depth of this violation and our nation's response. Others may have short-term trouble sleeping, experience haunting images, and quietly dread silence or impenetrable fears. Still others, particularly those at-risk of emotional instability, might find themselves face to face with self-destructive behavior.



In the week following the terrorist attack, eight children were seen at just one Child Guidance Center in Connecticut threatening suicide. These youngsters had prior histories of depressions, suicide attempts, abuse and neglect. For most people, the terrorist attacks and subsequent threats to our safety have generated anxiety and sadness. For unstable children and precarious families, the attacks have exacerbated feelings of isolation and despair.

With the number of children who have lost an adult relative, the grief of our nation and a growing war, community mental health is critical for child and parent alike. Yet, a system of coordinated children's mental health care within the community has barely sprung.

Glaring mental health needs require infrastructure. We need both a prevention intervention and a response to fears before long term delayed responses kick in, hurting families and routine functioning. KidCare should be fully implemented without delay.

Easy access and point of entry. Governor Rowland personally called each Connecticut family that faced a loss in this tragedy. Each grieving family was linked to a professional support person who was there to walk them through whatever they needed — transportation, filing of papers, counseling, searching — whatever.

We need such a system of care when we are not facing a national crisis. Governor Rowland cannot personally call and refer each family needing care in Connecticut, but he can metaphorically call by creating policy that gives personal, streamlined service to each family. A

system based on one person per family—a ‘single point of entry model’— would better serve families facing crises and tragedy on any day of the year.

People seeking service should not have to talk to eight people to get what they want. This is not customer friendly. In truth, it sends people packing. Every family should be able to have access and infrastructure point of entry to get what they need.

Prevention. So we did not prevent this tragedy, but what can we prevent? Is there a prevention strategy when a national disaster hits? The public right now wants to be sure we are safe in airports, and at Grand Central Station. As the letters and stories above show, children are also scared and need to feel secure at school and at home. Yet, a secure child requires more than an extra lock on the door or police officer at the corner.



While we grapple with the complexity of protecting ourselves against an insidious global force, what is it that we can *prevent* in our own state that would help us feel more in control, and improve the future for our kids? Health, safety and learning might be steel beams as we hold up hope against illness, violence and school failure.

Preventing violence among children. Teaching our children to foster safe schools through their behavior is an important step to help students contribute to their communities and improve their confidence and sense of safety in these uncertain times.

Connecticut currently suspends or expels hundreds of children from kindergarten and first grade for aggression. Preschool teachers describe an increase in aggressive children with fewer social skills in the last five years.

Up to one fourth of the children in this state have been involved in bullying incidents. The only common factor in the youth school shootings across this nation was bullying. The majority of the children with the guns had been the targets of bullies over a long period of time with no intervention. Bullies look for difference and then attack. Difference became a vehicle for routine torture without intervention for years.

Research-based anti-violence programs, such as the Olweus model, have shown decreases in youth aggression by 50 percent in just two years. Creating safe learning environments for children through anti-violence programs would help our children learn to cope well with difference, emotional upsets and whole school culture change towards aggression among peers.

Preventing poor readers and thinkers. Literacy is the baseline for thinking beyond oneself, entering other worlds, critical thinking, and global competitiveness. With international cooperation and growth, citizens should be capable of reading for pleasure, depth analysis and response. Yet, forty percent of the children in our nation will not read or read at grade level.

A child with reading problems in third grade is on a downward trajectory. Many of these children get placed into special education though they are not special education children. In fact, of the children who are labeled special education "learning disabled," eighty percent cannot read. Misplacing these students takes money away from the public and tools away from the twenty percent of learning disabled children who seriously need assessment and intervention.

New tools in reading diagnosis and intervention are as helpful to a teacher diagnosing reading difficulty as an x-ray is to a doctor diagnosing a bone injury. Once assessment is done, virtually 95 percent of all children having difficulty with reading can be helped with very specific interventions. We need only train our teachers in current reading research and practice to fill the nation's literacy gap with readers and thinkers.

The states have not yet systemically trained our K-3 teachers in this new research based early literacy assessment and intervention to teach reading effectively. If we prevented literacy problems in the young we would have more dollars, fewer special education costs, more student success, fewer dropouts and less student aggression. The Bush Administration has realigned federal dollars to states in early reading success based on this new research and its outcomes.

These are just two examples of prevention interventions in violence and learning. A prevention framework, particularly now, can offer significant cost savings, hope as well as a shift from failure to pride in performance with success.

Sustainability. Much will be knocked down now. Not just dahlias and sunflowers to re-enact and master horror. But a lot of what we have built risks being cut back or ignored due to growing fiscal crisis. What should be held on to with ardent voice and how can we make the most important items sustainable?

Children's policy and programs are often the first to be cut in times of fiscal downturns. How do we come together as a large community to protect what matters most for children in a time of haze and fear?

In a Connecticut survey on devolution and funding, the public was asked how to prioritize cuts for children as well as how to plan for hub sites if services needed to be consolidated. Respondents recommended that budget priorities uphold: a) equal access; b) program accountability to the public; c) parent input; d) efficiency in streamlining and coordination; e) citizen involvement; and f) a preventative focus rather than just being reactive.

A Child Prevention Strategy in the Wake of Terrorism

States seeks to sustain renewed pride in community, invigorate youth with hope and safety and impede child and family negative outcomes from terrorism. A suggested checklist in policy, coordination as well as leadership message might include:

- Maximize national pride, social contribution and caring through expanded civic engagement, leadership and service projects for youth and families;

- Teach tolerance through cross-cultural activity and policies that embrace and teach the strength of diversity;
- Keep the schools open after formal learning hours, linked with community agencies to ensure child safety;
- Develop methods to honor local heroes through events, ritual, and ceremonies so that children witness everyday heroes for models and mentors. Ensure safe learning in early childhood programs and schools through structural review, emergency protocols and anti-violence curriculum.
- Create School Assistance Systems in each school, offering proper training, communication and collaboration procedures among teams and ensuring that the system is supported by the administration so that it can function properly.



- Coordinate community mental health services with child care, preschool and public schools to address early signs of stress and to diminish emotional crisis.
- Secure a community mental health system for children and families within towns with adequate infrastructure, federal funds maximization and a coordinated system of care.
- Create a mechanism for family and youth input into the budget dialogue on cutbacks to meet the recession *balanced* with proactive planning in prevention policy for child health, safety and learning.
- Create intergenerational paths where possible, developing tutelage for our young and hope and connection for our elders.
- Develop a state Children and Terrorism Preparedness Council with state and community child development experts to advise on policy and budget issues and response, as needed, across policy domains in health, safety, mental health, and education.
- Prioritize single point of entry systems for children and families to help consumer access, streamline service and bolster trust in state government efficiencies.

- Civics - Bring democracy home. Make our nation aware of how democracy works and what we are fighting for. Build opportunities for the public to engage with adequate tools for sustained participation.
- Dream and Envision - An artist died in Tower One who was sculpting throughout the night and into the morning. His works were about flight—flight away from oppression and towards redemption. May his flight from the Tower, as well as those others who left us on September 11, be redeemed by our acts.



Art and writing inserts are from the exhibit "I Will Never Trust the Sky Again," students response to September 11. This exhibit and the event with students reading their work was held at the State Capitol, Hartford, Connecticut on November 14, 2001. The event was documented by CT.N television.